

Band 23

A
S E R M O N
PREACHED BEFORE
THE HOUSE OF LORDS,
IN THE ABBEY CHURCH OF
ST. PETER, WESTMINSTER,

ON TUESDAY, JANUARY, 30, 1770,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED TO BE OBSERVED AS THE
DAY OF THE MARTYRDOM OF KING CHARLES I.

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

JONATHAN LORD BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH

K. Shipley

L O N D O N,
PRINTED FOR T. CADELL IN THE STRAND.
MDCCLXX.



THE BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH'S

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE

THE HOUSE OF LORDS,

JANUARY 30, 1770.

Die Mercurii, 31^o Januarii, 1770.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, that the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby given to the Lord Bishop of SAINT ASAPH, for the Sermon by him preached before this House Yesterday in the Abbey Church *Westminster*.—And he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

ASHLEY COWPER,

Cler. Parliamentor.



ISAIAH xxxiii. part of ver. 6.

AND WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE THE
STABILITY OF THY TIMES.



S the form of this world, and of the most considerable objects in it, is continually varying; and as things acquire and lose importance by the changes of time and circumstances, I hope I shall not be thought to have departed too far from the limits prescribed to me, if I consider my subject in the point of view, which seems most to merit your attention at present, and is most likely to suggest the means and excite the desire of serving our country. To this end, I shall take leave to regard the guilty scenes we commemorate, not as the whole of my subject, but as one link of that long chain of causes, which the wisdom of Providence has been employing, for the space of several ages, in
B forming

forming the manners and character of this distinguished nation. The doctrine contained in my text, and implying that improvements in knowledge and arts, add not only to the credit, but to the strength and security of a nation, will be better illustrated by this manner of treating my subject, than from a regular comment on the words themselves. "And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times."

THIS country has not always enjoyed that pre-eminence of power and dignity which it is now possessed of. Before the Reformation, our ancestors had shown themselves capable of war and conquests; had given proofs of manly sense, and a spirit of freedom in the frame of their laws and constitution; and had produced some rare examples of learning and genius: but, upon the whole, they must be acknowledged to have been very inferior to the southern parts of Europe in literature, in manners, in commerce, and in the arts of life. It must be owned too, that the attention of our countrymen was awakened by slow degrees, and not till most other parts of Europe had been struck with the novelty, the truth, and the great importance of the doctrine taught by the Reformers. They were then little versed in the arts of controversy; and the part they took, was more owing to the example of their neighbours,
and

and to the influence of political events, than to the love of truth and the spirit of inquiry. But they soon began to feel and exercise their own powers; and growing interested in so important a cause, they proceeded at length in the work of reformation with as much learning and sagacity, and more good sense and moderation, than the ablest of their teachers. And though the good work was soon interrupted by the revival of popery, yet the short continuance, and the violent effects of it, excited a warmer zeal for reformation, and gave strength and spirit to their after-endavours. It was long before the fear of popery subsided; and while it lasted, it encouraged a careful study of the scriptures, and a critical examination of the grounds on which its principal doctrines were founded. And the new sects that started up continually, by furnishing fresh matter of dispute, enlarged the bounds of inquiry, and accustomed men to defend themselves against attacks from every quarter.

THE mind of man easily proceeds from one discovery to others of a similar kind. It was natural for them, who had just freed themselves from the encroachments of ecclesiastical power, to enquire into the rights and authority of civil government. Even under the prosperous reign of Elizabeth, there appeared a disposition to examine into the

grounds and foundations of those powers which were exercised with moderation, glory and utility. Instead of allaying this inquisitive spirit, her successor acted as if it had been policy to encourage it. His feeble acts of violence, and the declamations he wrote, to convince his people of the excellence of arbitrary government, could only tend to excite those jealousies, and stir those questions, which a wise prince would chuse to suppress. For it is the wisdom of government to prevent enquiries into the origin of its powers, by answering the good purposes for which they were granted or assumed.

IN the unfortunate days that followed, the spirit of enquiry, that had been raised, became more vehement and more general. Their religious and civil disputes were blended together, and communicated their rage and acrimony to each other. On one side, the necessary acts of authority were considered as oppression; and on the other, the just remonstrances of the people were treated as sedition. This irritable state of mind is certainly not the most favourable for the discovery of truth; but yet it may help to shake off prejudices, and prepare the understanding to make a proper use of the calm, that follows such agitations. For in those days, the reverence that had been annexed to old opinions, was shaken and impaired by the violent attacks

attacks that were made upon them. The received dictates of law and government were confuted by the sense of oppression, and the impulse of necessity. Their grievances were heavy and palpable. The hand of violence hung over their heads; and their terrors were awakened by their sufferings. It was not then necessary to convince them of their dangers by long and intricate reasonings; or to use persuasion and intreaties, to make them sensible of their grievances. They acted in consequence of their feelings; and burst the chains of sophistry and violence, by the efforts which sense and nature made to preserve themselves. We ought to think over the transactions of those times with tenderness; for they were the actions of our forefathers: not to engage in their passions; but to draw with temper and mildness such admonitions from their history, as may teach us to avoid civil dissensions, and to value peace and good government: to consider the outrages of the times, the publick miseries, the fatal end of a misguided virtuous prince, and the state of horror and confusion they lived in, as one of the great scenes which providence sometimes introduces to execute its mysterious purposes; and which at that time produced a visible change in the manners and opinions of the nation. For, in that fierce conflict of tempers, interests and characters; of enthusiasm and superstition; of tyranny and faction; of ambition and liberty; of

all the vices and virtues exerted with as much force and industry as human nature could employ; great and valuable talents were formed, beneficial views were opened, and the outlines of many important truths were struck out with incorrect boldness and strength. And though the majority of all parties were too much prejudiced, and too much heated to see truth in any sect but their own; yet there were a few, who were able to possess their faculties, and to look with temper on the confusion and madness of the times. To them, the distresses of their country, amidst scenes of horror and melancholy, afforded much matter for reflection, and many inlets of improvement. They were taught to distinguish the true boundaries of reason and religion, by the strange deviations from them, that were before their eyes: they saw the excesses of liberty, and the evils of tyranny and oppression; and that both are equally inconsistent with the rights and the happiness of mankind: and they learned from the irreconcilable variety of opinions, that toleration and mutual indulgence are principles of natural justice, and the only practicable conditions of living in peace and charity. These were of that sort of men whose talents give them an authority over the minds of others. They taught their countrymen to think and reason with more clearness, and in a natural language, free from scholastic subtleties and the affectation of learning;

ing; and to the honour of the established church, the greatest part of them were her members. From hence we may conclude, that during the miseries of the civil wars; and perhaps through the experience of those miseries, under that all-wise direction which bringeth good out of evil, the nation in general was acquiring a more comprehensive view of things, and juster notions of religion and government.

IN the times succeeding the Restoration, religion and liberty had much to fear; but those times were not unfavourable to the improvement of knowledge. The rights of the people were left insecure and undetermined; and they were always in danger from the power, the claims, and the insidious arts of government; besides the remains of some old prejudices in favour of arbitrary principles. But then this situation obliged them to a stronger exertion of their faculties; made them vigilant and attentive; and gave constant exercise to their reason on the most important of all subjects, religion and government. In other great kingdoms, the liberty of enquiring into men's natural rights had been suppressed for the security of the state; in ours, the endeavour to suppress it gave warmth and spirit to the exercise of it. There were also other objects of importance, which at that time
claimed

claimed the attention of the people. Fresh matter was furnished to their enquiry and imitation, by the growth of manufactures, the extension of commerce, and the improvement of navigation; for in those great sources of national strength, some neighbouring states were still superior to us. It was also our good fortune to avail ourselves of the folly and cruelty of our neighbours, who drove into our arms some thousands of their most deserving subjects, and with them many useful arts and inventions; rather than they would permit them to worship the God of their fathers, after the manner which they called heresy. That all these causes of improvement were not without their effect, may be collected from the progress then made by some of our contemplative countrymen, in the most arduous of all sciences. For they were the inventors of that clear, simple, and sublime philosophy, which remains to this day the noblest and most successful effort of human genius, and which is still more valuable for its method and principles, than for its discoveries. Such exalted talents and abilities, so superior to the highest attainments of other men, could not have been formed amongst an ignorant people. It was in vain to expect that a nation possessed of these high endowments, and full of the conscious pride that accompanies them, should submit with patience to part with them, and whatever else they held

held dear, at the command of an arbitrary prince. Yet there was one found weak and unjust enough to require from them such a sacrifice. The event was, that his subjects saw, with a proper indignation, the mischief that was prepared for them; and wisely giving up, for a time, the views of their respective parties, the members of the established church, and the protestant dissenters of all kinds, uniting their efforts, and joining in one great, durable, and national interest; they burst at once the chains of slavery and superstition, because it was not possible that they should be holden of them.

THE conduct of our ancestors at this period; the courage and firmness with which they asserted their liberties; the temper and wisdom they discovered in the constitution of their government; and the tenderness and humanity with which they listened to the prejudices, and adjusted the claims of their fellow-citizens, afforded at that time a great and instructive spectacle to the rest of the world; and an example of right behaviour on signal trying occasions, which ought to be ever dear to their posterity.

AND we ought to remember, with gratitude and veneration, how much the nation was then indebted to that wise and singular monarch; that hero without passion or va-

C

nity,

nity, whose virtues and services, we must own, with shame, were not sufficiently respected by our ancestors.

FROM this æra we first obtained a prospect of better times; an age of domestic peace and liberty; of knowledge and arts; of private happiness and publick glory. The improvement of commerce was the immediate consequence of freedom, to an active people, possessed of great natural advantages, and who had acquired the skill to use them. And their endeavours were animated, and their views enlightened by their alliance and intercourse with a wise commercial republic, which had first taught the world, what great things may be effected by industry, when protected by a free government. From that period, notwithstanding the interested views of men in power, and the opposition which even their best intentions are sure to meet with from their competitors; notwithstanding the contradictory measures of parties, and the accidental madness of the populace; yet, upon the whole, the great objects of publick national good have been better understood, and more successfully cultivated, than in any other age. The people who had shown such activity and vigour in their former precarious state of liberty, did not slacken their endeavours, when the full and free exercise of their powers, and all the advantages arising from it were secured

cured to them. It would be a task of more labour than use, to trace out the particular steps of their advancement in commerce and arts. Let those who have visited other countries, compare the most flourishing of them with the present state of their own; and let those who are advanced in years, call to mind the appearance of things which they saw in their childhood; and then, after surveying the face of this kingdom in town and country, the extension of agriculture, the new arts of cultivation, the works of public utility, the rivers, the plantations, and the buildings, which cast a lustre over the whole island; add to this the neatness, convenience, and elegance diffused through the middle rank of life, and penetrating into the most obscure and distant parts; and having surveyed all this, let them judge of the cause by its effects, and estimate the spirit and understanding of this nation, by the greatness and the rapidity of its improvements. That useful species of philosophy which we mentioned above, which traces out the operations of nature by well-chosen experiments, and patient observation; which is the offspring of our own country, and which spreading from hence, has improved and enlightened great part of the world; has mixed its beneficial influence with the management of commerce, the cultivation of arts, and even with the common employments of life. The pursuit of natural knowledge still

continues; not indeed with a success that equals the great discoveries made by our fathers, when the secrets of nature were first laid open to them; but yet the common stock is still increasing by daily additions, and there remain very valuable gleanings, after the full harvest of science, which they had the advantage of reaping before us. Every profession has shaken off its antient prejudices, and learned to reason and judge, in their respective provinces, with greater accuracy, and on better principles. The civil and religious disputes which exercised the passions of our forefathers, have lost their virulence; having at last undergone that cool examination, which always produces either unanimity or peace. The dissensions in state have not been kindled for many years by the fury of national parties, but by that ambition and struggle for power, which will ever be inseparable from human nature. If the passions of the people have sometimes been inflamed by the instigation of factious leaders, or by some unjustifiable steps of government; the storm has soon spent itself, and without any mischievous effects. Even the present distractions of the times, which have been owing to causes very disproportionable to their effects, and been fomented by the arts of men whose wisdom is certainly not equal to their ambition, will subside of themselves, as soon as the good sense of the people has calmed their apprehensions. It will not long be practicable

cable to keep alive groundless jealousies, and to alarm their minds with the dread of grievances which they neither feel nor understand: and our Sovereign, in due time, will reap the fruits of his patience and long-suffering; of his care for the happiness, and his indulgence for the errors of his people. All this, and greater things than these, may with assurance be hoped for from that solid and clear good sense, which has now been improving by the constant experience and discipline of several ages, and which may justly be considered as the characteristic of this nation; which, when unbiassed, and left to itself, has a wonderful discernment in the characters of men; is able to instruct statesmen and ministers in the great objects of public utility, and the means of attaining them; and when it acts with freedom, carries with it that invincible spirit, which can execute every practicable undertaking; which is itself the greatest of all our national resources; and will be found, in times of severe trial, capable of doing greater things for the public service, than experience has yet shown, or imagination suggested to us.

LET it be allowed me, on this occasion, to dwell only on the merits and improvements of my countrymen, in which they excel mankind; at least, to wish that it was excusable to pass over in silence the profligacy and licentiousness,

tioufness, the insatiable love of pleasure, the contempt of order and law, of religion and government, which have already prevailed too far, and which are the natural effects of great prosperity upon vulgar minds. And though the vast numbers who manage the business, and support the honour of the nation, cannot be deeply infected with these vices; and the instances we meet with in private life of every amiable and useful virtue, ought to be kept in our minds on this occasion; yet such is undeniably the growing corruption of our public manners, as ought to give a very just alarm, not only to the friends of religion, but to the lovers of their country. But let us hope, that the sense and virtue of this people will exert themselves to prevent their own destruction; let us hope more from that overruling Providence, which has always protected, and which has often saved us; and let us turn our eyes from this melancholy view of things, which neither our subject nor our inclination lead us to pursue.

THE reflections which we have made in honour of our country (true and just as we esteem them) would be very unworthy of this place and occasion, if they were to terminate in mere amusement, or in the indulgence of that vanity which all men assume to themselves from the exploits and renown of their countrymen. Yet, I hope, I shall be justified,

justified, when I remind you, that these reflections ought to be taken into consideration, when we endeavour to form a reasonable notion of that important moral duty, the love of our country. If the society we live in has really the superiority we boast of, over other communities, in wisdom, intelligence, the laws of government, and the arts of life, it certainly ought to be served, defended, and obeyed, with proportionable degrees of spirit and affection. The inhabitants of this country would ill deserve their wealth and plenty; all the advantages and ornaments of life, of which they have so large a share; the liberty they are proud of; and that pure religion which their fathers were ready to die for, and which they too much neglect; if they showed no more zeal for the government which procures them these advantages, than the oppressed subjects of some kingdoms do, for the laws and customs which are the causes of their misery. Our countrymen, on the contrary, have reasons of the most powerful kind to love a community, which is so eminently distinguished by its merits, its happiness, its beneficial views and purposes. It is honourable, it is virtuous to promote the interest of a community, which aims not at greatness by unjust measures; which seeks not conquest, and the means of tyrannizing over its neighbours; but rather to maintain equality and independence between bordering states, and to suppress the ambition

ambition of others; which founds all the superiority it pretends to, on a more dextrous application of the gifts of nature to the purposes of life, and on communicating useful arts and inventions to the rest of the world. It is the common interest of mankind that a nation, to whom they are so much indebted, should be revered and supported, and enjoy its glories in a state of permanent prosperity. But they who are the subjects of such a government, ought to preserve a deep and lively sense of their own privileges and happiness; and to assume that virtuous pride which makes men worthy of the honours that are conferred on them. They should reverence a constitution from which they have derived a long continuance of blessings; and they ought to study the principles, and consider the structure of it, that they may be qualified to preserve, to defend, and to improve it.

THE warmest loyalty, and the most willing obedience is due to him who is intrusted with the execution of such a noble system of laws; for it is only in obedience to the laws, that the effect and excellence of government is seen. And as there is no other people who so well knows the ends and the advantages of government, there is none who ought so cheerfully to submit to their governors. To scrutinize their conduct with rigour and malice, is unwise and ungenerous.

nerous. It deprives them of their just and natural reward, the exquisite pleasure which is felt in serving a grateful people: it diverts them from the great objects of public good; and it discourages men of mild and ingenuous tempers from the service of their country. But it has always been the weakness of our countrymen, to exercise their discernment with too much severity on public affairs; and to require more at the hands of their rulers than can reasonably be expected from creatures like men. And yet, that their statesmen have not, in general, been so corrupt, or so incapable, as they seem to take for granted, may appear from this single consideration; that it is by a series of administrations, almost every one of which has been unpopular in its turn, that this kingdom has attained to its envied power and prosperity. And let us reflect with due candour, that it requires talents and experience of the most universal kind, to manage the affairs of a nation, whose commerce, empire, and influence, renders it more or less connected with every other people.

THERE are other reflections arising from the view we have taken of our subject, not unworthy the attention of statesmen and ministers.

D

To

To preside over a people which has so many titles of pre-eminence above other nations, is the highest office in value and dignity which can fall to the lot of man. It opens, to a generous mind, the noblest, the greatest, the most practicable means of serving our country, and doing the most extensive good to our fellow-creatures. Great part of the work is made easy to them by a constitution of government, and a system of laws, which carry with them the experience and wisdom of ages ; such as the most comprehensive mind of itself could never have invented, and would chuse to be restrained by : but, indeed, they are not properly restraints ; but the rules which wisdom and goodness have formed to themselves for the execution of their own purposes. Now, to wish to shake off these rules, which render government easy, consistent, and popular, for the sake of acting by mere will and humour, would be childish folly : but coolly to intend to ruin the liberties of the first people in the world ; to destroy the talents and virtues, the arts and sciences, the power, the commerce, and the happiness of such a nation as this, (for none of these can long survive our liberties) would be a work of much deeper guilt in this enlightened age, when those blessings are become greater in themselves, and the value of them is better known ; than any of the tyrannical attempts which our forefathers so bravely withstood. I am firmly persuaded,

that I speak the language of our Sovereign's heart, when I say, there is no person in the whole extent of his dominions, so strongly interested in the preservation of our liberties as himself. To destroy them would be to pluck up the roots of his own greatness; to become the inconsiderable monarch of a wretched people. This is a truth which has received new light and evidence from the experience of every reign; has actually rendered the revival of arbitrary designs more odious and more impracticable; and it ought to render us very cautious of imputing such designs to those who are appointed to rule over us. How cruel and ungrateful must such suspicions appear to him who places his happiness in the love of his people! Men of virtue and moderation will not indulge a disposition of mind so repugnant to prudence and humanity, and so destructive of happiness. They will think it not too late to show repentment, when they begin to feel oppression. What else is wanting, but union and public confidence to make us enjoy completely, the fullest tide of prosperity that ever flowed in upon any land?

THERE would be a manifest impropriety in treating a subject of such universal concern, if I should entirely omit to consider in what respects it is applicable to that illu-

strious order whose commands I am now obeying. Let it therefore be allowed me, with all due humility and respect, not as an officious adviser, but as performing a part of my office, to remind those who are the first in rank and titles among an active, knowing, and victorious people; that this pre-eminence was annexed to their birth, not by any natural right, (for nature knows nothing of such distinctions) but to reward the merits of their ancestors, and to form an order in the state, whose property and education, by rendering them able and independent, might qualify them to be trusted with a perpetual share in the legislature. Now, in whatever hands power is lodged under a government so equitably constituted as ours; and indeed under any government, there always goes along with it an obligation to use it to those purposes of public good, for which it appears to have been given. This is the only good tenure by which all legal authority is held. And while they feel themselves thus strictly obliged to acquire and exercise the virtues and the abilities, which are requisite to the discharge of their office; let them remember, that they are placed, by their rank, as it were, in the publick view; exposed to the examination of a people, who are more inclined to discover faults, than to forgive them. Not only their parliamentary conduct, but the abuse of their wealth and influence; the vitious, illiberal, or effeminate turn of
 their

their pleasures ; even the idleness and amusements of their private hours, become matter of public curiosity and censure. Now, these are censures which the wise and good will always respect ; and which the most rich and powerful cannot despise with impunity. Indeed, there is no rank of men, either in this or any other country, to whom it is of so much importance to maintain a good character ; that treasure of life, the value of which is too little known ; and without which eloquence, knowledge, and application, often become pernicious, and even contemptible qualities. Mere expence and magnificence can neither give it, nor atone for the want of it. The loss of weight and authority in one great council, can never be well supplied by procuring an undue influence over another : For neither God nor man will consent, that true honour and credit shall be attainable by any other expedients than wisdom and integrity.

QUITTING therefore party and family connections, which engage the good and the bad indiscriminately in the defence of each others conduct, and whose interests, in some respects at least, must necessarily vary from that of the public ; let every one pursue the plain open path of duty and honour, and let all unite in one virtuous confederacy to procure the good of the whole. And to enable them
to

to render the important service they owe to their country ; let them, at least, keep pace with the public improvement in every liberal branch of knowledge ; let them exercise, in their private lives, that œconomy that preserves virtue, and that liberality which gives reputation ; let them acquire habits of temperance and application, which alone can qualify men for great undertakings ; and let them preserve that contempt of luxury, and firmness of mind, which can bear the loss of favour or of popularity. For indeed, without a generous indifference for the common objects of ambition, which nothing but a true sense of our religious duties can give, it will be extremely difficult for them, amidst the fluctuations of power and fortune, to maintain either integrity or peace of mind.

AND now, may the all-wise Protector of empires enable his favoured people, in this their day of trial, to resume that prudence and temper ; that steady, moderate, and generous spirit, which has carried them with success and honour through the dangers and commotions of former ages : so shall the terrors that afflict, and the calamities that threaten us, pass away like a cloud. Moved by the sense of impending evils, may they seek for refuge and support in the practice of their holy, and wise, and useful religion, which has efficacy to perfect all their improvements,

ments, and to correct the disorders they complain of; that one thing needful, and that one thing to them particularly wanting. May they still be distinguished above other nations, and employed in executing the noblest purposes of Providence on this earthly stage. "May knowledge and wisdom still be the stability of their times;" and may they hold forth to the instruction of mankind, a lasting example of freedom, virtue, and happiness.



